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NSC BRIEFING

4 September 1956

**EAST GERMANY**

- I. In reviewing the present situation there in East Germany, a major point is that effective Soviet control remains unchanged, in spite of a number of moves and actions designed to demonstrate that East Germany is "sovereign". This Soviet control is still the essential factor in East Germany's status.
  - A. The recent withdrawal of approximately 30,000 Soviet troops does not alter the USSR's continuing strong control, which is still maintained by a force of nearly 400,000.
- II. The Communist East German regime could not survive without this Soviet military support.
  - A. Overwhelming popular opposition and discontent in East Germany would be sufficient to topple the Reds from power in a very short time.
  - B. The Communists have not succeeded in improving the poor conditions which are the principal basis of this discontent.
    1. Living standards are not up to pre-war levels.
    2. The average consumption of food during 1955-56 was lower than in any Satellite except Albania.
    3. Fats, meat products and sugar are strictly rationed, and at times, the ration cards cannot be honored.
    4. Refugees continue to flee East Germany at the rate of 6,000 to 7,000 per week.

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III. At present, however, little--if any--effective resistance to the Communist regime exists. Most East Germans appear to be biding their time in hopes of improvements in the future.

A. This lack of effective resistance does not mean that there are no strong anti-Communist elements in East Germany.

The East German churches, for example, possess a surprising degree of independence.

B. They are not, however, in a position to offer more than non-violent resistance to Communist encroachments on religious freedom.

IV. As to the Communist Party in East Germany, since the downgrading of Stalin, it has been shaken by controversy.

A. This controversy is centered on the person of the party boss, Walter Ulbricht. He is unpopular both among the Communists and with the populace in general.

B. To most people, Ulbricht represents the worst sort of example of the Stalinist "cult of personality."

C. Yet Ulbricht has not been purged, as have some other Stalinists in the Satellites possibly because the Soviet Union is fearful of taking an action that could result in popular disturbances.

D. His continued position, however, may be because the Soviets wish to oust him at a psychological moment in the future, perhaps in order to affect the outcome of the next national elections in West Germany (October, 1957).

V. The East German Communists will probably continue their slow and cautious adjustments to the new conditions of liberalization throughout the Bloc.

A. Living conditions may improve somewhat, although a substantial improvement appears impossible, because of the basic inadequacies of the system.

1. A measure of the USSR's concern over East Germany's poor living conditions is afforded by the recent grant of Soviet credits for consumer goods purchases.

VI. Finally, the USSR continues to oppose any "reunification" of Germany despite propaganda to the contrary. Future Soviet policy toward Germany will probably aim at "stabilizing" this frontier region of the "Socialist camp."

NSC BRIEFING

5 SEPTEMBER 1956

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EAST GERMANY

- Note ketype on p. 3*
- I. In reviewing the present situation in East Germany, a major point is that effective Soviet control remains unchanged, in spite of a number of moves and actions designed to demonstrate that East Germany is "sovereign".
- A. The recent withdrawal of approximately 30,000 Soviet troops does not alter the USSR's continuing strong control, which is maintained by a force of nearly 400,000, remaining in East Germany, to say nothing of the strong and highly mobile Soviet forces in Poland and the Western USSR.

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- II. Thus, Soviet control is still the essential factor in East Germany's status.
- A. The East Germans, themselves, are generally anti-Communist and the regime is almost without popular support.
  - B. The Communists have not succeeded in improving the poor conditions which, together with Germany's continuing partition, form the principal basis of popular discontent.
    - 1. Living standards, while better than at the time of the June 1953 riots, are still not up to pre-war levels.
    - 2. The average consumption of food during 1955-56 was lower than in any Satellite except Albania.

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3. Fats, meat products and sugar are strictly rationed, and at times the ration cards cannot be honored.
4. Refugees continue to flee East Germany. From 1946 to the end of 1955, over 2½ million have escaped to the West, and the total for the first 8 months of 1956 shows 50,000 more refugees than the same period in 1955 (160,000 in Jan-Aug '55; 210,000 in Jan-Aug '56).

III. At present, however, no active resistance to the Communist regime exists in East Germany. Most East Germans appear to be biding their time in hopes of improvements in the future.

- A. Even though there is no active resistance, a strong anti-Communist potential does exist in East Germany. The East German churches for example, possess a surprising degree of independence.

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- B They are not, however, in a position to offer more than passive resistance to Communist encroachments on religious freedom.
- IV. As to the East German Communist Party, it was shaken by controversy following the downgrading of Stalin.
  - A. This controversy has centered on the person of the party boss Walter Ulbricht. He is unpopular both among the Communists and with the populace in general.
  - B. To most people, Ulbricht represents the worst sort of example of the Stalinist "cult of personality."
  - C. Yet Ulbricht has not been purged, as have some other Stalinists in the Satellites.



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1. The Soviet Union may be fearful of taking such an action, because a "concession" of this sort would encourage popular demands for further actions, on such issues as free elections and unification. The Russians no doubt remember that both the June 1953 Berlin riots and the June 1956 Poznan riots followed the granting of concessions by the Communist regimes.

2. Ulbricht's continuing tenure, however, may be for another reason. The Soviets may wish to reserve his ouster for some psychological moment in the future, perhaps as a means of swaying the outcome of the next national elections in West Germany (October, 1957).

3. The West Germans have steadfastly declared they will not deal with the East German Government on any matter so long as Ulbricht is a member of that Government.

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2. With Ulbricht, out, the ~~West~~ German Socialists--who are strong advocates of East-West German unification talks--would have more popular support for their position and might therefore make major gains at the polls.
  3. The Russians no doubt believe that a Socialist West German Government would be likelier to quit NATO than a Christian Democratic Government.

V The East German Communist leadership will probably continue its slow and cautious adjustments to the new conditions of liberalization throughout the Bloc.

A Living conditions may improve somewhat, although a substantial improvement appears impossible, because of the basic inadequacies of the system.

~~SECRET~~

A measure of the USSR's concern over East Germany's poor living conditions is afforded by the recent grant of Soviet credits for consumer goods purchases.

Finally, the USSR continues to oppose any "reunification" of Germany despite propaganda to the contrary. Future Soviet policy toward Germany will probably aim at "stabilizing" this frontier region of the "Socialist camp."